

Jan. 10, 2021 BAPTISM OF OUR LORD - Service of Word and Prayer

We are using the Service of the Word liturgy this morning, from your green hymn book, the Lutheran Book of Worship, page 126. The prayers are based on Sundays & Seasons. Shut off all the distractions in your home. Enjoy the quiet for a bit – take in some deep breaths. Light your candle. **You may wish to add a large bowl with a pitcher of water to use during the Thanksgiving for Baptism liturgy.** May your family be blessed in this time together.

The Gathering

Greeting: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.

Leader:

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ☩ one God, the fountain of living water, the rock who gave us birth, our light and our salvation. **Amen.**

Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism, we are clothed with God's mercy and forgiveness. Let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

Water may be poured into the font as the presiding minister gives thanks.

We give you thanks, O God,
for in the beginning your Spirit moved over the waters
and by your Word you created the world,
calling forth life in which you took delight.
Through the waters of the flood you delivered Noah and his family.
Through the sea you led your people Israel from slavery into freedom.
At the river your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit.
By water and your Word you claim us as daughters and sons,
making us heirs of your promise and servants of all.
We praise you for the gift of water that sustains life,
and above all we praise you for the gift of new life in Jesus Christ.
Shower us with your Spirit,

and renew our lives with your forgiveness, grace, and love.
To you be given honor and praise
through Jesus Christ our Lord
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.
Amen.

Hymn: ELW 451 - We Are Baptized in Christ Jesus

God has made us his people through our Baptism into Christ. Living together in trust and hope, we confess our faith.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.*
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Lord be with you ~ and also with you.

Prayer of the day: Holy God, creator of light and giver of goodness, your voice moves over the waters. Immerse us in your grace, and transform us by your Spirit, that we may follow after your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Word

The Old Testament lesson is from **Genesis 1:1-5**

Psalm 29 found on page 228

The New Testament lesson is from **Acts 19:1-7**

Please rise for the gospel lesson. *Holy, Holy, Holy, our hearts adore you. Our hearts are glad to say the words: you are Holy God.*

Bishop Jason Zinko from the Manitoba/Northwestern Ontario Synod brings us the message this morning.

Gospel: Mark 1: 4-11

Grace, mercy, and peace to you in the name of Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

Over the past months, I've noticed something. Like you, I've noticed a significant number of negative things about the pandemic. Things like job loss, stress, death and grief, and social isolation. These are real issues and I think that they will affect us and our communities for a long time.

But there are also positives. People have been more generous. The pace of life has slowed down for many people – meaning more time with immediate family. Workplaces have needed to be more flexible and realistic about what people can accomplish. Many of us have been more willing to support local economies.

There have also been some real positives specifically about church involvement. I know that your church councils may disagree, but this time away from our same old patterns is helping to us to see a broader vision of how the church can be the church today.

In many instances, online worship attendance across our churches has remained consistent or gone up from traditional in-person Sunday gatherings. But probably the most exciting thing is seeing an increase in how people are engaging in the work of the church and looking for opportunities to be fed and to grow in faith. I've had conversations with pastors telling me that people who have not consistently connected to the worship life of the congregation are now regulars online, especially with devotional times and learning about spiritual practices. It seems that many people are beginning to look beyond what has been a focal point for us for many years – Sunday morning worship – and instead are digging into the meaning behind it all.

I'm actually very excited about what this all means for the church, and I can't wait to see more clearly how God is working in our lives during this time.

The reason I bring up this observation is because I think that it ties directly to our reading today. I've heard, and read (and let's be honest, I've preached) a lot of sermons this time of year that talk about John the Baptizer. In all of them, there is some mention of John being a bit weird. Most have mentioned something about his role as a prophet, or at least fulfilling the role of herald laid out in the prophetic writings of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). Some have delved into the question about why Jesus needed to come to be baptized in the first place. Instead of talking about any of that, I want to get right to what it means – why this story matters for us as followers of Christ. And it is not to learn about John the Baptizer.

This story – the whole reason for this day in the Christian calendar – is to focus on baptism. Not only Jesus' baptism, but ours. Since we are tied to Christ in and

through baptism, we can't really separate this story from how we are part of it in our own baptism. And I don't mean the just the actual rite of baptism in church. I'm talking about why we baptize and what it means for us. I'm talking about who we *become* in baptism.

Fundamental to our understanding of baptism is that it is all about identity. It's about belonging to the family of God. We hear the voice from heaven talking to Jesus, saying, **"You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased."** Jesus, in his baptism, is told that he lives in the loving embrace of God. In our own baptisms, we are also told that we live in that same gift of grace. We are also the ones who are called children of God. Celebrating how God spoke to Jesus in his baptism reminds us of how God spoke to us in our baptism.

And that is significant. In our world today, there are fewer and fewer places where we can feel as though we really, truly belong anymore. Hardly anybody works for the same company for their entire career. Hardly anyone lives in the same house for their entire adult lives. Fewer people are members of organizations or groups for more than a few years before moving onto another community. Family members move to other cities or towns, and some families just disintegrate altogether. Most of the last year affected how we engage with friends and family. For those of us who are used to travelling and meeting people face to face, we know that even the best technology is a poor substitute and has left us feeling disconnected.

Whatever circumstance we are in, changes in culture and social interaction means that we don't feel like things shape us in the same way. Because of that, it's harder to figure out who we are.

But in baptism, we know exactly who we are. We know exactly who we belong to. We know that through an act involving some water and a few words, we have been brought into God's inheritance and into the community of believers that we call the church. We are given an identity that shines through everything that we say and do.

That identity and that grace also means that God looks past our sins and our shortcomings, and still gives us forgiveness and grace. And that means that each day we are freed again to live our lives knowing that we are perfect and loved by God our creator.

This is all purely a gift from God. Now what we do with this, and how we live this out are also important. This is something that it would be worthwhile looking at John the Baptizer as an example.

John understood that living out the identity that God gave us in baptism asks something of us. God doesn't claim us and name us so that we can just sit around like a lump watching the world go by without taking part in God's work. Baptism is actually the beginning in helping to bring about God's kingdom in our world today.

Baptism is the start of us preparing the way of the Lord. And the way of the Lord is a way of justice. It's a way of equity and forgiveness. It's a way of sacrifice and self-giving – of caring for others and community above ourselves or our individual comfort. The way of the Lord means turning to face God again so we can see how to be a part of God's intention for all of creation.

John gave a few pretty clear examples from his day. He told tax collectors not to cheat the system. He told soldiers not to extort and threaten. He told the

comfortable to share with those who needed comfort. He told people not to assume that they were following God just because of the family or country they were born into or the place they went to worship.

I wonder what some examples would be for us today. What would it look like for us to listen again to God and live in a way that brings God's hope for creation into reality here and now?

I'm certain that you or your congregation are already doing some of that work. You may be collecting and distributing food to those who don't have enough. You may be advocating and fundraising for those in distant places who have been displaced or live through war. You may be helping an elderly neighbour with their grocery shopping so that they don't need to risk their health. Or you may send social media posts or call members from your congregation just to check in. As congregations and as individuals, I hope that we do prepare the way of the Lord regularly.

But preparation isn't just a one-time event; it's a way of life. As followers of Jesus and as baptized Christians, that way of life is a result of the grace God gives us first. It's something we do daily in response to God's gifts. We can't just sit through church as though attendance is all that God wants from us – as though just getting to the building or connecting online is the goal. God wants us to engage deeply with the people and the world through our faith.

So that will mean inviting people who are alone into our communities as a way of bringing hope into someone's life. It will mean letting our faith inform the way we do business and how we treat colleagues and competition. It will mean respecting the people that our friends don't think deserve it. It will mean practicing generosity out of the abundance that God has already given us. It will also mean

regularly taking time to practice and grow in faith so that we are able to hear God's voice more clearly each day.

That's what Jesus did after his baptism. It was immediately after this scene that Jesus went out into the world bringing: good news, healing, forgiveness, compassion, and justice. It was after this that Jesus ate with people and taught people, stood up for people and walked with them. It was after this that Jesus regularly made time for prayer.

I hope that we will be able to see and follow that example as best as we are able. I hope that God will give us the faith to see and hear what Jesus tells us. And I hope that, more than anything, God gives us the strength to follow Jesus' lead in preparing the way of Lord right where we are. That is who we are. It is who God made us to be. And it is how we can help God to bring forgiveness, justice, and peace to the world. Amen.

Hymn: LBW 518 or ELW 838 - Beautiful Savior (*alternative tune*)

Our Response

OFFERING PRAYER

Gracious God, you came to us as one unknown, bringing joy and salvation to the earth. Nourish us at your banquet table, that with all who welcome your birth we may proclaim your peace, revealed in Jesus Christ, our Savior. **Amen.**

Prayers of the People by Mark Boese

Guided by Christ made known to the nations, let us offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all people in need.

A brief silence.

For the church throughout the world and its leaders, that guided by the Holy Spirit they proclaim the forgiveness of sins, let us pray. **Have mercy, O God.**

For wilderness and water, wind and wild beasts, and all living things on earth, that God's goodness is revealed through creation and faithful stewards care for all God has made, let us pray. **Have mercy, O God.**

For the nations of the world and their leaders, for laborers busy both day and night, and for peacemakers amid strife, that God inspire all people to use their strength wisely, let us pray. **Have mercy, O God.**

For the sick and those who provide medical care, for the imprisoned and those who show them mercy, for the lonely and those who provide companionship, for all who suffer *especially* those we name before you that God shower compassion, let us pray. **Have mercy, O God.**

For people working from home, for students returning to school, for those seeking renewal in their daily work, that all the beloved of God experience grace and peace, let us pray. **Have mercy, O God.**

In thanksgiving for the faithful departed who now rest from their labors, that their witness inspire us in our baptismal vocations, let us pray. **Have mercy, O God.**

Merciful God, hear the prayers of your people, spoken or silent, for the sake of the one who dwells among us, your Son, Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

The peace of Christ be with you always and also with you.

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray **The Lord's Prayer:**

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: WOV 651 or ELW 671 - Shine Jesus Shine

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you,

The Lord's make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you,

The Lord look upon you with favour and give you (+) peace. Amen.

Dismissal Go in peace. Share the gift of Christ.

Thanks be to God.